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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 004808

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NGO ESTIMATES 10 PERCENT INCREASE IN NEW INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN FIRST QUARTER OF 2005

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

1. (C) Summary. A respected Colombian NGO, the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES) estimated that there were 61,996 new internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the first quarter of 2005, a 10 percent increase over the same period in 2004. CODHES attributed the rise to an increase in confrontation between Government security forces and the FARC, expansion of drug cultivation and aerial drug eradication, paramilitary ceasefire violations, and GoC detentions of alleged terrorists. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Head of Delegation privately questioned CODHES' figures based on the number of Colombians ICRC has assisted in the field. Government IDP agency contacts said that while official tallies were not complete, 5653 new IDPs registered with the Government and 25,000 applications are pending. While all agree that there is a serious humanitarian situation in Colombia, the debate over figures on new internal displacement continues. END SUMMARY.

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GoC Registers New IDPs, CODHES Estimates New Displacement  
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2. (C) The GoC's IDP agency (Red de Solidaridad Social - RSS) reviews applications of individuals who apply for Government benefits because they have been internally displaced as a result of Colombia's long standing conflict. If approved, the RSS officially registers the individual and provides government assistance. The RSS reported it registered 5653 new cases of IDPs and 25,000 applications were pending at the beginning of March 2005. CODHES Assistant Director Marco Romero explained that CODHES estimates the number of new displacements based on information from the media, NGOs, the GoC, ICRC, the UN, the Catholic Church, local government, academic institutions, and through some field work. Based on these trends, CODHES projects the number of new internal displacements.

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The Difference?  
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3. (C) The difference between the two organizations is their methodology. The GoC registers new IDPs and can provide detailed information on origin of displacement, current residence, occupation, and how many members in the family. CODHES has no capacity to track individual IDPs, but relies on open source materials to estimate new displacement. CODHES' Marco Romero told RefCoord that if there are conflicting reports on new displacement from equally reputable sources (i.e. the Prosecutor General's Office and an NGO), CODHES always uses the higher number. CODHES includes reports of internal displacement in its estimate regardless of whether the case is accepted by the GoC. If an IDP registers with the GoC and displaces again, the Government does not register the new displacement since the IDP is already receiving GoC aid. CODHES does include the new displacement.

4. (C) GoC Rate of Refusal: CODHES reported that the RSS refusal rate rose significantly and in some areas (Choco Department, and Bogota) was over 50 percent. RSS contacts reported a 21 percent refusal rate nationwide but cautioned that the rate varied within the country. The RSS acknowledged that there is an under registration of IDPs and launched an information campaign in early 2004 to reach populations in remote areas and to increase information about IDP rights under Colombian law.

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Drug Eradication and Displacement  
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5. (C) The GoC does not/not approve applications of those who displace because of aerial drug eradication -- CODHES does. Romero said CODHES has no way of estimating how many displace as a result of aerial eradication. CODHES reports cites "forced eradication" as a major cause of new displacement in early 2005, especially in Narino Department. The Narcotics Affairs Section reported that the GoC sprayed 58,143 hectares of coca and 748 hectares of opium poppy in the first quarter of 2005 -- the vast majority in Narino (44,567 hectares of coca and 393 hectares of poppy). While increased aerial eradication in Narino Department supports CODHES' conclusion, NAS notes that the rate of replanting of coca in Narino remains high despite several spray campaigns.

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Population and New Census  
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16. (C) CODHES reported that much of the new displacement originated in southern Colombia (generally less populated areas) because of the GoC's Plan Patriota, drug eradication and confrontations between the FARC and GoC security forces. The RSS cited the highest number of newly displaced from Choco (1237) and Antioquia (905) -- both in northern Colombia. Colombia's last nationwide census was done in 1993. The new census, which begins on May 22 will provide more clarity on actual population and demographics.

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ICRC Assistance to New IDPs  
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17. (C) ICRC's Head of Delegation Juan Pedro Schaerer (protect) told RefCoord he did not know how CODHES arrived at their estimate of nearly 62,000 newly displaced. ICRC staff said ICRC figures historically represented between 40-50 percent of official GoC numbers of IDPs. The ICRC assisted 11,549 newly displaced during the first 3 months of 2005 which ICRC said tracks with RSS staff unofficial estimate of 20,000 new IDPs in the first 2 months of 2005.

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Massive Displacements Rise  
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18. (C) All sources agreed that massive internal displacements increased in early 2005. Conflict between FARC and paramilitary groups battling for control over key narcotics cultivation and transit corridors in the Rio Atrato region of Choco Department resulted in the displacement of more than 1500 persons on February 14. ICRC reported that they have assisted 6,900 individuals in northern Cauca Department who displaced as a result of FARC attacks on Toribio, Jambalo, and other towns that began April 14. Most of the IDPs are members of indigenous tribes.

19. (C) COMMENT: CODHES' recent report sharply criticized the Uribe Administration for rejecting the idea that there is an "internal conflict" in Colombia and predicted the GoC's statistics on new displacements will reach CODHES estimates by the end of the year. Colombia's new national census, which begins May 22, will update official population figures from 1993. GoC and ICRC contacts believe CODHES has overestimated the number of newly displaced in order to keep attention focused on IDPs. As the paramilitary peace process has progressed, IDP advocacy groups have grown concerned that more GoC and international community funding will go to support the paramilitary demobilization and reinsertion process, leaving less for IDPs. END COMMENT  
WOOD